

Homily on the anniversary of an ordination

Today we bring you a homily preached this past summer by Ed Schroeder on the occasion of a fortieth anniversary of ordination. In it, Ed makes reference to several visual aids, including a picture made by his wife Marie, a photograph of which is included below (and as an attachment to this e-mail).

In a separate note to us, Ed explains the significance of Marie's picture as follows:

"As in the homily, the point of the picture is that the word 'church', both in its Hebrew and its Greek originals—*Kahal* and *Ekklesia*—designates an event. A gathering, a congregating, where the "grex" get together. With only one exception, I think, the N.T. Greek never uses the term as the subject of a sentence, and that one place, as I remember, is where the *ekklesia* at one geographic location sends greetings to the *ekklesia* at another place. So the gathering at X sends a greeting to the gathering at Y. Thus the *ekklesia* itself never goes out into the world to do something, is never the agent for any action out in the world. Rather, the *ekklesia* is itself the action, the action depicted in Marie's painting. Granted, the birds, the members of Christ's body, do all sorts of things not only when they are feeding and chattering at the gathering, but also when they fly away to their manifold daily-life callings. Whoops! I'm getting homiletical again, but I already sent you the homily!"

That very homily is what follows.

Peace and Joy,
Carol Braun, for the editorial team

Keith Holste (Seminex 1974). 40th anniversary of ordination. August 24, 2014. Christ Lutheran Church, Webster Groves, Missouri.

Texts:

Isaiah 51:1-6

Romans 12:1-8

Matthew 16: 13-20 [Caesarea Philippi]

There's danger in asking an eighty-three-year-old professor to speak for any reason. The fifty-minute lecture is his standard module.

(To quote Bob Bertram: With dotage comes anecdotage.)

Today's task: connecting three visual aids right up front here [preacher not standing in the pulpit, but amidst the visual aids between the folks and the altar area] with the three texts.

The visual aids:



1. [Addressing Keith Holste, who is sitting in the chair.] Keith, tell us about the rock from your Kansas hometown. For us today, this Rock is the visual for Peter's confession.
2. The second visual aid is this bird feeder, this artwork of Marie's for what the term 'Church' designates in both Old Testament and New Testament. Birds gathering around a bird feeder with the Chi-Rho label on the birdseed, and, most important, actually feeding on the food available at the feeder.
3. The third visual aid is Keith himself, facing all of us here in the congregation. Congregating—that is, gathering

together. Right now we ARE Marie's picture.

First off. What happened forty years ago?

Keith Holste was ordained, "ordered," to do the work of ministry. Do what? Do what the Augsburg Confession says ministry is. And forty years ago Keith said out loud to everybody there, "I'll do it."

What's that? Let's check. Augsburg Confession Article 5: THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH.

To understand AC 5, you need to see the sequence.

AC 1: Christian faith is all about God, the Triune God.

AC 2: With this God we're in trouble. Sin.

AC 3: Jesus is God's rescue operation for folks stuck in sin.

AC 4: People get rescued when they trust Jesus's offer. "Here, I did it for you. Take it, it's yours."

AC 5: OK, how does the Jesus offer get to folks who weren't there when he did it all? Answer: "ministry."

[Read AC 5: THE OFFICE OF MINISTRY.]

"To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided gospel proclamation and the sacraments. Through these, as through means [instrumenta in Latin], he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. And the Gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merit of Christ, when we believe him."

"Solchen Glauben zu erlangen, hat Gott das Predigtamt eingesetzt, Evangelium und Sakramente gegeben. Durch diese Mittel gibt er den heiligen Geist, welcher den Glauben, wo und wann er will, in denen wirkt, die das Evangelium hören. Das lehrt, dass wir durch Christi Verdienst und nicht durch unser

Verdienst, einen gnädigen Gott haben, wenn wir solches glauben."

Better the German text itself with the term '*Predigt-Amt*' (Gospel-offering agency) for the Latin term '*officium*'. God's program, an agency, for getting sinners connected to Christ. Those sinners who weren't around when Christ was walking the paths of Palestine.]

In agreeing to take that assignment, Keith put himself between a rock and a hard place.

We've got a Kansas rock here up front from where Keith grew up. Our visual aid for Christ, the Rock of our Salvation.

We've got the rock three times in the texts we've just heard. And none of them is negative. Peter's name is Rock in Greek. [Petrified wood, we talk about. Petr-oleum—oil out of rocks.] Then his faith-confession. Jesus calls it ROCK, the ROCK on which his church will be built, a ROCK so solid that the Gates of Hell are no match for it. And then the third one: the Old Testament reading, "Rock from which you were hewn."

That ROCK confession is a Jesus-confession: "You are the Christ, the son of the living God."

What's the "hard place"? The hard place is human hearts. Hard hearts. Yes, us folks here this morning.

Christian ministry is the business of connecting *that* rock to those "hard places," us hard places.

Keith's been in the business for forty years. We're here this morning with that very consciously on our minds.

The Gospel reading gives us the specs on the connection between ROCK and church.

But first a Word about the third visual aid, the bird-feeder picture up here. Marie created it for a class I taught not long ago. It's a picture of the church.

Christian ministry is the business of getting folks fed at the bird feeder and making sure that the birdseed is the food that Peter confessed.

Ministry is the name for the connecting process. How the goodies from Jesus get to people. That bird feeder is a picture of "ministry." When folks come to feed there, church happens.

Summa. Gospel text. The bird food. Jesus says he will build HIS kind of "gatherings" (his sort of congregatings) on this foundation. In short, he promises to get the bird-feeder operation going and keep it going, the power of death and hell notwithstanding.

Now the Epistle. What happens to the birds, to these "hard-places" when they do feed at that bird feeder?

They move from being conformed to this world to being transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

That English translation doesn't do very well with the original Greek. Starting with the words conform/transform. A nice pun in English. But too tame for the Greek. Schema and metamorphosis.

"Instead of being hooked by the schemes of the present age, undergo metamorphosis."

Metamorphosis is a BEEEG change. Like from caterpillar to butterfly. Same critter, but oh, so different! You'd never have guessed.

The metamorphosis starts with your “mind.” Getting your head screwed on right about what God’s up to when Jesus appears on the scene. What’s God really up to? What’s really is the whole ball of wax of God’s operation, where it’s all going to wind up?

Mind-blowing. That’s the metamorphosis.

And what follows in the next paragraph is also mind-blowing.

It’s not just Keith who has this assignment. It’s all the birds who’ve been at the feeder. If you’re baptized, you are on assignment. Signed up for the bird-feeding business.

In this Epistle text Paul specs out seven—count ’em!—different sub-assignments to carry out the Big assignment. There is no New Testament notion that “clergy” is the class of folks who are s’posed to be doing this.

It’s everybody who’s been feeding at the bird feeder.

As they fly away, they’re on duty. Different sorts of birds, but the same assignment: Get folks to the feeder. Connect ’em to the ROCK. Do what Peter did. Tell them about the ROCK. Set up a bird feeder—be a bird feeder—when you bump into other birds. Wherever it happens.

One body, many members, St. Paul says.

Folks who have fed at the Christ bird feeder get connected. First of all, to Christ, but also to each other.

One body, many members. Main point: all connected to the Head. But that connects them with all the others so connected. No one in exactly the same spot as the next one. Many locations.

Many different gifts. So many different vocations in your different locations.

Eyes can do stuff that our ears can't.

Some are gifted talkers. You get folks to the feeder with your gift of gab.

Some are good at helping people. OK, you people-helpers.

Some know how to teach. OK, teach folks.

Some are gifted counselors. OK...

Some are gifted with stuff to give away. OK...

Some are gifted with leadership. OK...

Some are gifted with empathy. OK...

A quick final peek at the Old Testament text.

The rock quarry where God got this started. Abraham and Sarah and God's promise. The promise was about "salvation and deliverance and righteousness and comfort and joy and gladness." The whole ball of wax called Gospel. And the simple imperative was: "Listen, look, look, listen, just listen."

Why? With all the schemes other folks dream up you wind up in the desert, waste places, wilderness. The schemes themselves vanish like smoke, wear out, and if you try to live on them you die.

"BUT my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never end."

Peter's confession links to this Abraham/Sarah text: "You, Jesus, are what God was promising to Abraham and Sarah."

Back to Keith for closure. For forty years getting folks in hard places connected to that ROCK. Not that you have to be formally ordained. Anyone already feeding at this bird feeder can bring it to others, can bring others to it. But we forget. And thus wind up following all sorts of schemes and going backwards from butterfly to caterpillar.

So we appoint folks to make sure it happens. Even “order” them to do so. That’s what ordain means. You are under orders to do this. Under orders to be an agent for the metamorphosis St Paul himself is promoting. He too was under orders, just as Keith is. Under orders to move us away from caterpillar schemes and morph us into butterflies. That’s the change from “munch and crawl, munch and crawl” to “sip nectar and fly, sip nectar and fly!”

Today we thank God for putting Keith under orders to be his bird-feeder tender, his metamorphosis minister. OUR bird-feeder tender, our metamorphosis minister. So that we keep on keeping on as that picture over there. Birds and butterflies. Feeding on Christ and flying!

Let’s sing it with a bit of variation to the common doxology, namely, with Keith himself in the hymn text.

[Line the text to the congregation.]

Praise all through whom God’s blessings flow.
Today Keith Holste here below.
For him and with the heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

EHS